MESSAGES from MARS

By T·L·B·WESTERDALE

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A CHAPLAIN'S EXPERIENCES AT THE FRONT

BY
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LONDON
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25-35 CITY ROAD, AND 26 PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

20782

First Edition, 1917

PREFACE

THE letters from the front, written during my seven months there as an orderly in the R.A.M.C., and published in book form with the title, *Under the Red Cross Flag*, have received a hearty welcome in many Methodist homes; and encouraged by the reception given to my first literary child, I have collected some of the letters written for the Press during the past eighteen months spent in the field as a chaplain.

Trusting to the continued interest of my readers, I have endeavoured this time to send home a serious message in a form which shall be acceptable to all.

I am again indebted to the Editor of the *Methodist Times* for his permission to republish letters II, III, IV, and V, which appeared in that journal, and to the Editor of the *Methodist Recorder* for his

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permission to republish letter I, which appeared in its columns.

I crave the indulgence of readers who may find any errors of quotation, as these letters have all been written at the front, some in billets, some in dug-outs, one on the battle-field, and one in a bivouac, without reference books or the usual literary aids, amid the distractions of army life, Hun whizz-bangs, and other little trifles disconcerting to the nerves and not helpful to the memory.

For anything that does not please—please blame the enemy.

I crave, too, the indulgence of those readers whose literary nerves will be jolted here and there as we travel along a somewhat uneven track. My train passes through tunnels now and then, also, but we have no paraffin to spare just now, at the front, for illuminating purposes. In other words, this little book must be judged in literary courts as a collection of letters written at various times and arranged, with a definite purpose, in their present order.

A glance at the titles of the letters will at once acquaint tourists in my train with the line we are travelling on, the scenery we shall pass through, the stations we shall stop at, and the terminus we shall reach in an hour or two.

We are travelling in a land of mystery—the land of Armageddon. We are travelling in a world deluged with blood, a world in which the hands of the clock of civilization have apparently been put back, very suddenly, a century or more. We shall see your husbands, sons, and friends on the field of Armageddon, at work and at rest, amid the strangest scenes of history. We shall take you across one corner of the real battlefield . . . . . Then we shall leave the horrors, and lest we despair of this 'gassed' world, still so full of storm, and sin, and sorrow in the twentieth century of Christianity, we shall show you the angels singing above it all.

T. L. B. WESTERDALE, C.F.,
1/4 K.O.R.L., B.E.F.

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Messages from Mars

I

THE MASSACRE IN BETHLEHEM

A CHAPLAIN'S CHRISTMAS THOUGHTS

OUR continental circuit in the war zone extends from Ypres to the Somme.

Ypres I saw in the morning of desolation when shops still sold jewellery. Last week I stood alone in the Cloth Hall ruins under the cold moon. For six long centuries the voices of some of Europe's richest merchants have mingled in those halls. There are twelve wide roads leading into the grey red skeleton of Ypres to-day, but the only sounds I heard were the 'drip-drip' of rain upon the stately corridors wide open to the sky, and the pad, pad, pad of the big sleek fearless rat.

Arras is not so crushed and lonely. You may find shops in her cellars—shops selling

strawberries in June. You may dine in the comfortable mess-room of a dainty French villa while Krupp's best thoughts go whizzing overhead. Arras still has its homes, — lives, not alone in memory.

Bethune is only spattered, and thrives. Hotels, estaminets, and shops blaze with light and buzz with life. There are ragged patches—constant reminders of the enemy at the gate. But if the Hun knocks a tooth out of Bethune, we knock two out of La Bassee. So there! Bethune breathes quite freely.

Albert is a brick and grey-stone shell, with many riddled roofs. She mourns in darkness. Not yet a hopeless ruin, but too dangerous for a resting-place. There, sentries wear an uneasy look, lorries speed up through the streets, and Tommies do not loiter at the corners. But the winter 'push' is dragging away the chains of Albert. She may now shake off her rags and clothe herself with a shadow of her former glory, though the beauty of her prophetic church is marred for ever.

For over two years many Wesleyan ministers have found their circuit centre in

these now famous towns, and have ridden out of them across the blackened countryside to the outlying villages, and thence have trudged wearily through the filthy mud to the duckboarded lanes of the line. Here, with forty pounds of worldly goods, we have lived in the study of hateful war, drinking in its lessons.

And now our third Christmas is upon us! How strange it all seems sometimes! Our homes have gone home. Our grey-haired fathers write that they have dusted all our books again, and find the *Hastings' Dictionary* useful. What a reminder it is, every day, that all the plans we make for life are so much waste of thought and time, especially plans for a pleasant life suited to our tastes. Who was it who said

> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will.

Surely a greater than Shakespeare!

If any one had told me, in July, 1914, as I lolled on the Irish Sea in a fishing-smack, idly landing whiting, that in Christmas week, 1914, I, dressed in Kitchener's 'convict blue,' would be found scrubbing the floor of

an Aldershot barrack-room with a hai brush and a bar of Sunlight 'Zeep' (as th Belgians call it), I should have advised hin to take a rest somewhere out of the sun Yet it was so; and, curiously enough, som of those who felt in their marrow that wa was coming, were the last to realize tha when it did come, they would be among th first to be swallowed in the maelstrom.

Fishing in the seas of memory, a few smal and insignificant incidents float into the net of consciousness as the 'catch' of Christma days in the Army. For example, at Alder shot, a card of a corporal whom we invite to dinner ate most of our fare, and departe with a new alarm clock of mine as a souvenir I remember that —— nearly getting 'C.B. for being late on parade. A day or two later, after forty-two hours of concentrated misery, tortoising across La Belle France in a freezing cattle-truck, seven of us, sworn pals, landed half-dead in the snow and excitement of the Flanders Front. We were the first 'K' draft to a Regular Ambulance depleted by the 'Retreat,' and they received us as strange creatures from another planet. Never shall I forget that awful Christmas

journey. How we sympathized with the Tommy who got out of his train and searched among the stones on the track! A sergeant shouted—

'What yer looking for, sonny? There ain't no flowers there.'

'No, sergeant,' came back the hopeful reply; 'but I've got a packet of seeds!'

We had Christmas again at the front, for the army gifts came late, but I experienced nothing of the joyous Christmas feeling of the years gone by. We always kept an old-fashioned Christmas at home. Stockings, cards, holly, mistletoe, crackers, presents after dinner, roaring fires, and Christmas hymns galore.

And Christmas Day, 1915! At 6 a.m. we received orders to proceed immediately to the trenches, in pouring sleet, by omnibuses. With the order came another, 'No Christmas fare of any kind to be taken. Army rations only.' That was a test of discipline. Not a man groused, but among the youngsters many an eye was dim, and many a heart was sad. I cycled fifteen wet miles in the afternoon to canteens along the line. The evening was spent in drying garments

and discussing the contents of a tin of turkey which may have had some distant relationship to the real article, though the fact was not obvious.

This year we shall probably convey Christmas greetings over the way with a bombing stunt in the rain.

And my experience is that of most men in the army.

If you ask me, then, can we feel the Christmas spirit at the front amid the ruins of Ypres and the rattle of machine-guns, can we sit down and meditate on the peaceful night, the Babe in the manger, the starry heavens, the songs of angels, the tinkling sheep-bells, the simple shepherds, the wise men from the East with gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh, and listen gladly to that sweet refrain—

> Hark! the herald angels sing
> 'Glory to the new-born King.
> Peace on earth, and mercy mild;
> God and sinners reconciled'?

I should say, 'No, not in the old way.' But I will tell you what some of us can think of with inspiration and hope.

It may surprise you. The Massacre in Bethlehem!

It is there—mark you—in the Christmas picture! And this year is it not very much to the front? Let us gaze at it and rediscover its message.

The Massacre in Bethlehem. Yes. Besides peaceful shepherds and thoughtful sages, there were other men who went to Bethlehem. Fierce soldiers.

The Coming of Christ from heaven to earth caused the furious hate of the Kaiser of the little Jewish world—Herod, the Syrian Hun. His power was to wane, thought he, if Christ came into His own, Jesus the true King of the Jews.

The Coming of Jesus broke many a mother's heart, made many a mother childless, and many a home a lonely ruin of blasted hopes and shattered joys.

The Coming of Jesus made Bethlehem a shambles and a hell, for all the little ones who might be Jesus were slain by Herod's ruthless sword.

The Coming of Jesus was heralded by the angels' triumph song—by the death of innocents and sobs from mothers' broken hearts.

Such was the first Christmas. The mothers suffered, paid the penalty, bore the agony of the birth-pangs which gave Jesus life—which ultimately will give Him victory.

History repeats itself.

What do we see to-day behind all these wasted, blood-stained cities of our line—Ypres, Arras, Bethune, Albert, and in the waters of the cold North Sea? What do we see in this Bethlehem of France and Flanders—yes, and England, too—in the scores of little cemeteries and single mounds which dot the country-side—the graves of innocents? We see again the fury of the devil who inspired the hate of Herod. The intensity of *this* fury, the immensity of *this* massacre, reveal to us but more clearly one certain thing—that Christ is coming into His Own with greater power and glory than we have ever seen. The spiritual powers of Darkness have intercepted this glad news on its way to earth. They have tapped it with hell's wireless, and acted, before earth's receivers have fully grasped the truth.

If we would only listen we should hear, above the weeping of Rachel, the voice of angels, as of old, and with them a great

white throng, singing, 'Hallelujah! Christ appears on earth to reign.' If we would only listen we should hear, above the crash of high explosive shells, what John of Patmos heard above the clang of arms thousands of years ago, the tinkle, tinkle of heaven's wireless in the signal office of the highly-attuned Christian soul, 'for they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. *Behold, I come as a thief* . . . and he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon' (Rev. xvi 14-16).

And this glad message from head quarters would travel like fire, by daring runners, to every divisional brigade and battalion office of the Church Militant, and spur to songful efforts every hard-tried soldier of the King—

Hold the fort, for I am coming.

We believe we are witnessing the last desperate efforts of the massed forces of evil to stamp out the Christ in the Bethlehem of this world, lest He come into His own,

and Herod be no longer king. The struggle with the Napoleonic powers may yet be a long one, not a matter of months, but even of some years. Evil may not come to a head, even in the Central Powers. The East has dark potentialities. We must be prepared for anything. All that is necessary is that we shall understand the inner meaning of the contest—lest we despair. The devil is never restrained easily, even when the Spirit of God has him well in leash, and to-day he has broken his chain and has run amok in God's world with blood-red eyes, and snarling teeth, and frothing, gory mouth, seeking for Jesus, for he knows his time is short.

This, to the writer, is the true explanation of the worldquake of our time. And, lying in my little bivouac on the Somme, as I gazed upon the Madonna holding the Holy Child above the ruins of the church and town of Albert, I saw the issue. That remarkable sight in Albert is the sign of the failure of Herod.

Jesus, too, was near us.

A prey to the satanic spirit of covetousness and fear, the modern Herod struck hard and craftily, with cruel power, before the king-

doms of the world built upon his beloved basis of Force should be wrenched for ever from his sway. The swelling stream of liberty and light in Europe, Asia, and the New World was undermining the foundations of his throne. Herod struck at Christ—through men. And Christ escapes again, though the mothers of men must weep amid the desolate homes of Bethlehem. The church of Albert said to me, 'Jesus still lives—above the ruins.' And, as He bends over the graves of Albert, I think I hear Him say, 'It is Me they would have slain; not you, my martyred little ones.'

But I have seen Him also moving about among the ruins while the massacre was going on.

I saw Him one day weeping in sympathy as an old, grey Belgian farmer let his Benjamin go to the war with a laugh, and shook the desolate room that night with bitter sobs.

I saw Him one day in a dressing-station, bending low, as a dying Tommy was sending his last message to his little ones and wife away in London.

I saw Him one day passing by with turned

head as a wounded Boche handed his Iron Cross to a fellow padre of mine. And, as I watched the suffering, terror-stricken eyes grow large and gentle with confidence and gratitude as the padre wrapped the cross in cotton wool and promised to send it safely to the prisoner's home in Germany, I saw Jesus smile.

I saw Him sitting on a well at noon eating invisible food as a bleeding Tommy leaned from his stretcher and poured his last drop of precious water down the throat of a tortured enemy who had been 'lying out' three days and nights. Herod cannot kill the Christ in the Bethlehem of man's soul.

I know that Jesus lives. And I know, from what I know of God, that this awful massacre of innocents, the fruit of the spite of devils lashed to violent fury by His love for men, shall be overcome and swept away by a correspondingly mighty outpouring of love and light and life. I know that there must be an adequate answer from the heart of God to the wondrous sacrifice of the martyred souls of thousands of happy, innocent lads laid upon the altar of heaven. I know that the bitter agony of the bleeding

hearts of millions of mothers must move the Everlasting Arms to a closer embrace of this world. I know that Jesus is near.

> Oh! it is hard to work for God,
> To rise and take His part
> Upon this battle-field of earth,
> And not sometimes lose heart.
>
> Thrice blest is he to whom is given
> The instinct that can tell
> That God is on the field when He
> Is most invisible.

Yes, thrice blest! For the faith of some has been so stricken that they cannot believe that we shall see the white walls of the New Jerusalem emerging from the black smoke of Armageddon. It is passing painful, they say, in this day to see every nation setting up its national god again, and each erecting its own precious hedge of tough barbed wire. It is the pagan, not the Christian, ideal. What we believed to be a gradually cohering family of man melting into one by the fervent heat of the Father's love is splitting up again into cold and isolated units. This causes peculiar grief to the followers of Wesley. But it is only a phase, and when

dark winter's freezing storms have passed and the warm sunbeams of God's June presence have burst afresh upon His darling world, there will be finer roses in all part of His garden than have ever been seen before. In God's evolutionary processes there are many spirals, half in darkness, half in light, but we ascend all the time. One of the world's darkest hours—when the greatest light of fading Greece cried bitterly for a God or Godman to take away the darkness from their eyes—preceded the Birth at Bethlehem. And do we not always remember that story of the angels to whom God showed in vision the whole history of man, with all its storm and sin and sorrow, and then, after unfolding to their astonished eyes the final scene, asked them whether the world should be? And they, with one voice, cried, 'Create! Create!'

During the present period of darkness and insanity it is Methodism's duty just to 'carry on,' to keep the dust off, and the tail light on, Wesley's inspired motto, 'The World is my Parish,' lest the heavy chariots of Mars run down the light car of heaven's imperialism on the road of life.

It is Christianity alone that will make Hun and Briton brothers. A great daily paper was bold enough to make this statement in its leader a week or two ago. And if the Hun has little Christianity it will be more than ever our duty after the war to fan and foster the spark into a flame.

Therefore it is of the utmost importance that we should keep the ideal of the Brotherhood of Man high above the conceit of victory whilst we are thrashing the devil out of Fritz, so that after the last round—in spite of the bloody marks upon our face—we shall immediately lift him to his feet, and, with a forgiving heart, offer the outstretched hand.

II

WITH THE WARRIORS

An open motor-car was leaving the asylum—now the hospital. Inside sat a major and a captain, both with fresh wounds just dressed. They were going swiftly to the C.C.S. By the chauffeur sat the major's orderly.

A medical officer stood on the asylum doorstep.

'Good-bye, major. You're lucky to get a Blighty one, eh? Ha! ha!'

'Ta-ta, old man! And thanks, awfully.'

The car whizzed along the road, just as hell opened its gates once again. Across the track came many bullets and many shells. Across the track came a certain bullet and a certain shell. The orderly by the chauffeur fell forward heavily, the life-blood oozing from the little bullet hole in

his breast. One side glance, and the chauffeur set his teeth, turned the car, and dashed for the hospital again. Arriving there safely, he jumped down and pointed to the orderly. An R.A.M.C. man ran towards the car. The chauffeur opened the car door and opened his mouth to speak. But the words never came. Two bodies sat in the car, one bending forward, one erect with hands crossed on its lap. Both heads were missing—the work of one shell low down, crossing the road.

The chauffeur it was, who went to England, and with him a mental nurse.

* * * * *

He comes from Liverpool way, though his speech is without trace of the Lancashire accent. I think he is a bit of a humorist, this man. I was in his trench last week.

'How d'ye do, sir. Yes! Trenches very quiet 'ere, sir. Soldiers' Home, sir, compared with Wipers. Why, there's only a man, a woman, and a child in them German trenches opposite us 'ere. The man works the trench mortars, the old girl she runs along and

lets off a fixed rifle now and then, and the kid 'e sends up the flares at night.'

'And what happens to the other two at night?'

'Oh, they goes back to the village to sleep, sir. So does we, and sends along the old ladies to fire our star shells up. As I says, safest places these days is the trenches. Why, the last time I was back in reserve, sir, I near got kilt. I was takin' me washin' to a little 'ouse in the village there by the church—you can see the church from 'ere—that's it there; yes, wot looks like a telegraph pole—that's all that's left of it. Well, just as I had me 'and on the door knocker a coal-box comes along and shifts the 'ole bloomin' caboosh, sir. There was just a big 'ole—a big smokin' 'ole where the 'ouse had been, an' me left with the knocker in me 'and. Straight, sir! I got it now. Souvenir for the missus and family heirloom. Yus; give me the trenches. I don't feel 'appy nowhere else, and about the only thing I fears 'ere, sir, is them oil-cans!'

'Oil-cans?'

'Yus. Sort o' trench mortar shells they is—like a half-sized oil-drum, and filled with

all the blinkin' things the 'Uns 'as been collectin' from the Whitechapels o' Berlin. 'Andles, an' nails, and knockers, bits o' bedsteads, bits 'o stoves, bits o' nicky-nocky off fancy coal-scuttles, and all poisoned, so as one bit does yer in if it 'its yer. Why, t'other day, sir, one burst near me and sends a handful o' gramerphone needles into my stoo! So I picks 'em out and says to meself, "Harry, my boy, wait an' see." Sure enough next one that comes over 'as the gramerphones in it, and the next 'as the records, hincluding the 'Ymn of 'Ate; but, unfortunately, the records was broken. Yus, yer welcome to the needles, sir. I've rubbed the poison off 'em, and polished 'em fine. Thank you, sir. I always was fond of a good cigar.'

* * * * *

One day last week Sergeant E—— was coming out of the trenches when a stray bullet found him. Next day we laid him to rest in a little garden graveyard not far from where he fell.

'Killed in action. 1916.'

There is a shell-hole not five yards from

his grave, and close to the sergeant's little wooden cross is a solid little tombstone beautifully sculptured.

'Bon . . . . . hiot. Tué a L'ennemi Mars, 1915.'

A fragment of the Boche shell has obliterated the rest of the name.

Two graves. Two crosses. L'entente cordiale—in death.

In the next field a football match is in progress, and machine-guns are busy somewhere near.

The sergeant was popular. 'Dust to dust . . .' Every man in his platoon picks up a little loose clay and throws it into the grave. My colleague, Tweedie, is reading from a beautiful shortened form of burial service prepared by the United Board:

'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

'We thank Thee for the sacrifice which our brother has made for his country, and we pray that it may bring forth the fruits of liberty and righteousness. So help his comrades who have been spared that they may serve Thee and discharge their calling with courage and faithfulness.'

'Pass, man, pass! Go on, Bullybeef! Now! Shoot! Shoot!! Goal!!!'

'May the peace of God . . .'

Pop, pop, pop! Pop, pop, pop, pop, pop! Indirect firing from the machine-guns beyond the football field. This is the salvo over the sergeant's grave.

* * * * *

Among others, there are two little white houses in our village that have attracted my attention.

One has half a roof on, the other half is patched up with straw. For window-panes there are sand-bags. The building is just a ruin—destroyed before its time. Its floors are inches thick with brickdust, mud, and straw. The 'garden' in front is littered with débris, in some places two or three feet high, and dead rats—fat, healthy rats—are lying about everywhere. Two Tommies, with their eternal smile, are sitting on the door-step eating bread and cheese. On a slate in the centre of the rubbish-strewn, dead-ratted garden these words have been chalked quite recently:

'Dogs must be led on a string or a chain.'

On another slate: 'Please wipe your boots.'

Over the door of the cottage one reads: 'No shells admitted except on business,' and over a shattered window: 'Emergency exit.' This cottage is a typical example of Tommy's unquenchable humour in every ruined village of France—the humour which is an insoluble mystery to the French peasantry and soldiers. Even his dug-out must have a funny name, such as: 'The Chamber of Horrors.'

Go into the broken villages and towns recently occupied by the French, and you will find clever paintings on the walls. Here a sunset. There a picture of the shrine at Lourdes. Here a landscape with Amiens or Arras in the distance. There, again, is an artistic figure study, but you look in vain for humorous remarks so characteristic of the British soldier.

* * * * *

Half a mile away is the other little white house. In it resides the Town Major, an English Roman Catholic padre, who speaks

French fluently. I stayed with him a night and a day, and in the billet he gave me went to sleep to the music of the German bullets spattering my bedroom wall. Indeed, as I stood in the doorway earlier in the evening one passed clean through the door. This sort of thing is not conducive to sweet slumber. But the Town Major will not move. In the other tiny room of his house is an old woman, near to eighty, still holding on to her little ruined home, amid the wreckage, blood, and iron.

In her cupboards she has bottles—many bottles of home-made wine, rouge and blanc, and bière, with which she would not part. Oh, no; not for worlds! 'Après la guerre' —no wine if now she sells.

It was last Saturday night. The Huns have hunted high and low for a certain battery. They cannot find it. They never will. It is too cunningly hid. But they found this little white house. One shell hit a barn just across the road and threw its bursting fragments through windows and walls of the little white house. I went to see the Town Major afterwards. Bricks, dust, and glass littered his rooms.

Still he smiled. In his hand was a live shell.

'See, padre,' he said, 'this one didn't burst. He's a dud. He fell into the field three yards from my window. Isn't it beauty? I'm popping it along now to Brigade Head Quarters with this message.

I read the message:

'Dud reported here half an hour ago. Am sending him on to you for information and necessary action.'

As we went out I looked into the other rooms.

The cupboards were riddled with metal. Vin rouge, vin blanc, and bière poured out in pretty streams across the clean, red-tiled floor.

On the bed sat the old woman of eighty, huddled up, silent, uninjured, a look of pathetic despair, but no fear in her wonderful eyes. If only she had sold those bottles!

* * * * *

Two types.

He has suffered from shell shock, this man. Poor fellow, his nerves have gone. Nothing but the deepest sympathy should

be his lot, but his tougher comrades only 'kid' him. I saw him yesterday walking in the shadows of the shattered walls with the fear of death in his sunken eyes.

'Know wot we calls 'im, sir?' asked my pitiless companion.

'No.'

'We calls 'im "Windy Dick, the Dug-out King." Never comes out of 'is dug-out till we digs 'im out. Been in a fearful smash-up, and got it awful bad now, 'e 'as, sir.'

Suddenly he points to an officer crossing the road below us. He swings along in a careless way, this officer, with his helmet tipped jauntily to a ridiculous angle.

My companion waxes enthusiastic.

'There's a sojer for you, sir! My platoon commander!' And what pride there is in those three words! 'An 'oly terror 'e is, sir. Fears nowt. Comes from Australia, and carries a bowie knife in his belt. We wus out with 'im on patrol the other night and meets a 'ost of Boches. We slings our bombs and kills a few. There was a bit of a scrum. There was two 'Uns left, but we 'ad no more ammunition o' any sort. Our officer, he says: "Lie low, lads! I got one

bullet left in me revolver!" We lies low, and wot you think 'e does, sir? He jumps straight up—flares and bullets flying all about—and 'olds up 'is bowie knife-edge towards 'isself, and then shoots. Bullet hits the edge of the knife, splits in two, and each 'alf does for one o' the 'Uns, sir—honest injun! 'E's a 'oly terror, 'e is, sir!'

* * * * *

Simnel Sunday. My colleague Tweedie was preparing for lunch when the enemy began searching the roads. They put a crump right through his billet, sending a heap of bricks and metal splinters into his bedroom. What lunch he had was in the cellar. Our artillery sent to warn us that firing was on, but the enemy very kindly left us alone. About 2 o'clock Tweedie and I went up to the trenches. No services were allowed in the afternoon. Every man was ordered to stand to his dug-out in the reserve area. I took a parcel of socks, &c., to distribute in the line. Once again we walked into it. Just as we reached the communication trenches the concert began. Cooks, working parties, and padres bolted

like hunted cats for shelter. One discontented 4.2 warmed my face and took off the top of the trench a yard in front of me, doing its duty in the chalk beyond. A corporal shouted above the din: 'This way, quick! A dug-out, sir!' We turned. Another metal jam-jar seemed to creep round the trench, having heard our intentions, and chased us from the dug-out. We tried the other way. Same result. Sometimes shells are animated. They hear all you say, and will travel round a dozen traverses to look for you. So we just hugged Mother Earth and dug in with our fingernails, trusting to Providence. I put the parcel of socks on my head to impede the death-blow. But it never came. Soon the music died away, and we scraped the chalk off our knee-caps, trying to pretend we had been very brave. Cost in ammunition that morning for Berlin, £1,800. Casualties, ten rats! 'Twas a very lively day, and when at last I got to 'C' mess of the Blankshires in the trenches, I found that they had had a lively Sabbath morn, too! Two of them had been out early crusading between the lines. Lieutenant H. Hodkinson had secured a

German officer's hat, and was not quite sure what had happened to the head that once dwelt therein, and Captain Huthwaite had shot down a magnificent hare close to the entanglements, and with great daring fetched him in. Of course, when he said, 'Alone, with my revolver, I did it!' everybody rudely asked, 'Was it sitting?' Well, if you want to know, it wasn't! Further on still I found Lieutenant Keller, who is known and loved Lytham way, sitting in a traverse, loyal to Lancashire, faithfully devouring his Bury Simnel cake at the appointed hour, with one watchful optic ever on the enemy.

Oh, it was some Sunday was Simnel Sunday!

III

THE WARRIORS AT REST

HONOURS have been bestowed on three Wesleyan chaplains recently. The Rev. O. S. Watkins, who, as every one knows out here, has done deeds worthy of the V.C. over and over again, is now a C.M.G.; the Rev. Theo. Harris for bravery has won the Military Cross; and the Rev. W. H. Sarchet, for his splendid work in opening and maintaining Divisional canteen and recreation rooms, some of them constantly under fire for a year, has also received the Military Cross. I called on Mr. Sarchet the other day, and the following conversation ensued:

'Hearty congratulations on your M.C., Mr. Sarchet.'

'Look here, Westerdale, do you want any more Woodbines or pineapple chunks? We had a fine service here last Saturday night.'

That is characteristic of the man. This trench warfare with which we are now all so painfully familiar has resulted in a state of affairs behind the lines unknown in any other campaign. 'Pineapple chunks and services.' That is the world in which the padre lives. It has been the constant aim of Generals for over a year now to take the thoughts of the men off the war as much as possible when the troops fall back into the rest area behind their trenches. To this end they have made one or two padres in each Division 'officers in charge of recreation rooms,' their work being to organize and run Divisional halls and canteens on selected spots in each Divisional area. These places are not to make large profits, but only sufficient to cover expenses, to open up in a new area when we advance, and to purchase cinema machines, gramophones, literature, &c., also for the hire of pianos. Thus, Mr. Sarchet's Division, for example, which has been engaged in this work for a long time now, has large buildings in a town close to the trenches, and entertainments which would draw a critical audience even in England are held in these places every evening. Riding

through this town you can see, posted in prominent positions, printed placards such as these :

'The Best Divisional Cinema in B——. New films fresh from London every week.'

'Have you seen the —— Div. Troupe in "The Babes in the Wood"? Screamingly funny.'

'Varieties to-night at 6 prompt.'

All these shows are conducted by Thomas Atkins, and every 'turn' is contributed by him. We read in illustrated papers of famous stage favourites visiting the troops. Many are the uses of advertisement. Tommy manages all his shows near the firing-line without any civilian assistance. One Division I know sends a man over to London every ten days for fresh cinema films. In the new Divisions some of the men have been professional singers and actors in days of peace, and give very fine performances indeed out here. My own servant who left me at Christmas-time was a Scotch comedian, an excellent singer and clog dancer, too. He was in much demand at Yuletide. He possesses a permanent grin and a terrible squint. The battalion christened him

'Swivel-eye,' but he didn't mind a bit, and made merriment for all always. Another friend of mine, Lance-Corporal Mills, of the 13th Essex, is an English comedian, a splendid soldier, a sober, steady, hard-working lad, who makes our halls rock with laughter with his clean humour and clever witticisms and skits whenever he appears on the boards. But this is only one item of our social programme.

When it has been decided to open up a new hall in a selected village, Colonel Commings, the A.A. and Q.M.G. of our Division, or Captain Du Boulay, the D.A.A. and Q.M.G., shows us the chosen spot on the map. Then we find out if there is a suitable building at that village. If not, the Divisional Engineers immediately get to work and erect one of wood, with perhaps a brick foundation and corrugated zinc roof. At H——, which is now my centre, there was a suitable hall adjoining the church. It was the property jointly of the village curé and the village brewer. We engaged it from them at a rental of twenty francs a week. The brewer stipulated that we must not sell any other beers in the place, and the curé

required us not to hold sing-songs or musical services at hours when Mass was being celebrated in the church next door, which church, by the way, has a fine old Benedictine monastery attached to it, and dates back itself long before the time when William I conquered England. The brewer's demands were easily granted, as no beer or strong drink of any description is sold to the troops in our Divisional canteens. Having rented or built a hall, we go off to the nearest electrical power station to arrange for light. Sometimes there is fun here. At H—— we were in so great a hurry and the power people so slow that we connected up 'on our own' before things were finally arranged with the company. Result—their electrician cut us off suddenly while a concert was proceeding, and only a handsome tip persuaded him to let us shine again. Electricity, even in the country districts, is remarkably cheap in France. We can burn a fifty candle-power lamp for an hour for a halfpenny. Next we start the canteen. Securing a motor lorry we hasten off to the nearest town possessing an Expeditionary Force canteen or a Y.M.C.A. stores. The Expedi-

tionary Force canteen is a large wholesale and retail business run by arrangement with the War Office—a sort of military Harrods. Here we purchase tea, coffee, sugar, tobacco, cigarettes, cake, tinned fruits, chocolate, toffee, soap, bloater paste, and all sorts of other things that Tommy loves, and return to our hall. We get a stove or two from Ordnance stores, haggle with a local Shylock for coal at a wicked figure, buy coffee 'bols,' spoons, knives, forks, plates, pans, &c., from the nearest provincial bonanza, and in a few hours we are ready to 'carry on.' We remember that a certain Salvation Army hut on Salisbury Plain, known to us, found that their tea-spoons used to disappear mysteriously, so they asked for a deposit of sixpence on each spoon, to be returned when the spoon was returned. They started at the hut with two dozen spoons. At the end of a few weeks they counted them. They possessed a gross! We find that our utensils do not disappear—only our papers and magazines. Tommy much appreciates our efforts. The halls are brilliantly illuminated, and warmed with open coal stoves, and where we can get supplies, well sprinkled with

light literature, also with religious papers that are sent to us. The buildings are crowded every night.

One difficult problem was the piano. Back in the rest billets the officers' messes often hire all the pianos in the neighbourhood. There are never more than two pianos in one village, and one of these will be broken. We searched for two whole days for our first piano. We could get dilapidated ones with a few keys missing for twenty francs a night —oh, yes! One gentleman offered to sell me his—at least forty years old—for nine hundred francs, in good English money about £34! It cost about 13*s.* 6½*d.* new! At last I struck a town that has only a few English troops in it, and found a beautiful instrument, an Erard, for thirty-five francs a month. No sooner had I hired this one than Monsieur Paul Delebarre, the owner, produced another as good as the first. So our two largest halls have pianos now, and 'My Little Grey Home in the West' warms our hearts regularly every night. When the halls are ready the C.O.'s of the battalions in the area, or the General of the Brigade, get their officers to arrange concerts, and perhaps

a Divisional cinema company takes the place for three nights a week. When no entertainment is arranged the piano and stage are used by the men themselves for impromptu 'turns,' and the hall as a reading and writing room. I really believe the men prefer this to elaborately organized entertainments. Scores of letters home are composed in these places every night. Large bowls of tea and coffee are always on sale at the popular price of one penny, also packets of biscuits at one penny, ham sandwiches at twopence, and all the well-known brands of chocolate at English prices, so that hundreds of men who used to spend their evenings drinking bad beer in miserable estaminets are now regular visitors to us. They love the cheerfulness, warmth, and homeliness of these halls, and great is their dissatisfaction if we have to shut down the canteen department for the sake of some advertised entertainment, so much so that we are finding it necessary to have canteen and concert hall separated where possible.

This is the kind of social work that is being done at present close to the Huns' guns, and if you could see our laddies as

they return to the trenches after their long-looked-for period of refreshment in these rest-billet areas, you would say 'Good!'

The high spirits and humour of the troops never fail. The men on this front are confirmed optimists. Only yesterday Sergeant Mills, my secretary and right-hand man, handed me a scrap of cardboard left on a table in the H—— Hall. It is typical of Tommy at his best. It reads as follows:

> Here lies the body of an eighteen pounder,
> We buried her just where we found her;
> If anyone wants to sleep any sounder,
> Just hit the nose of the eighteen pounder.

Our men, too, behind the counter, are not behind the others in carrying on the smile. A new 'line' was purchased by us last week. To-day there is a notice in one of the canteens:

IMPROVED PROVERBS.

'A hair in the head's worth two in the brush. Try our brilliantine. 6*d.* a bottle.'

And another:

'Are we downhearted? Not round our piano!"

On Sundays the halls are used for services, and sometimes also on week-days. On the Sabbath there is usually Holy Communion at 7 a.m., and Parade Services for the various Churches until 2 p.m., and again Evensong or a Nonconformist Service from 5 to 6 p.m. Needless to say, the many chaplains are keen to get the use of the halls, as a piano and electric light and a rostrum for services at the front are 'some' luxuries.

Unless 'the great advance' comes soon, Tommy's life in the rest billet area will be almost as pleasant as life at home. Why did not we have these places last winter up at Ypres? That is a question we often ask ourselves. We look back on those days as an unhappy dream. Candles at 5*d.* each and a bleak barn at night! Now Tommy gets his 'bougies' at two for 1½*d.*, and sits in a warm room with *Punch* in his hands till lights out—on the Western front. But I wonder what it's like in Salonika?

IV

AN ATOM OF ARMAGEDDON

PUBLIC LIBRARIES VICTORIA

We are going in to-night to take X——. The brigadier says the village must be taken at all costs. Others have tried and failed. It is our turn now. The boys are drawing lots who will come back. Marked papers mean 'I return'; blank ones, 'I do not return.' There is much merriment. Dobson, the bombing officer's orderly, says to mine—who has been ordered by me to stay in camp and take charge of my kit:

'What sort of a souvenir do you want this time, Robby?'

'Yourself safe back again, Dobby; nowt else.'

'Good! Look after my two Boche helmets till I return, will you?'

There are extra rations to-day—figs, raisins, almonds, and walnuts! This *is* a

treat. At tea the bombing officer says to me: 'My last fight with the Boches, padre.' And it was so. A sergeant, with his commission papers in his pocket, said: 'Death or a medal for me this time, sir!' It was death, and his commission papers will be sent home.

The Divisional band is playing for us. Some men are too 'full' to go near; they would break down. Some are singing:

> Over the top with the best of luck,
> And we don't care a hang for old von Kluck!

Officers having taken a last cup of tea together are sorting our their kits. They are giving their addresses to the padre and to the second in command. The latter is ordered to remain in camp.

Now the men are paraded, and the C.O. on horseback addresses them. He tells of a German captain taken prisoner the previous night. Prisoner had told him that our battalion had done great damage last time in trenches. C.O. hoped it would do still more this time.

We are off. My orderly and another come

to say 'good-bye' and beg me once again not to go. But I could not rest away from the boys to-night. The last thing we saw was two sergeants left behind weeping as the old battalion moved off to its tremendous task below the ridge in the distance.

* * * * *

The attack is timed for 4.32 Ack Emma, which, in telegraphic language, means 4.32 a.m. 'At all costs X—— must be taken!' Every man is silent now with that thought. We have reached the line without loss.

3 a.m.—The doctor, his corporal, and myself are seated in the regimental aid-post—a hole in the sandy ridge six feet square. Behind and below that ridge are X—— and the Boches. The concentrated artillery fire increases. Thousands of shells swish over us. The enemy's fire increases, too. They send up more flares. The Huns are expectant—nervy. Our terrible bombardment must mean 'something special'—probably at dawn.

3.30.—The first case comes in. A young

lieutenant just out. His wrist-watch has gone and two inches of flesh with it. He seems more distressed about the watch than the wound.

4 a.m.—The firing is terrific. The doctor puts wool in his ears. I am already deaf, and cannot hear the whine of the Boche 5.9 over our heads. Some one says: 'Well, this is shell-fire, if you like!' Some one replies: 'Take the "s" off, and you have it.'

4.15.—They are bursting all around us now and carrying away the ridge top bit by bit. Three hit the aid-post. By God's Providence they are all 'duds.' A little of the roof slakes off and falls. Save for that and the dull thud, no more happened, or I should not be writing this. The only 'duds' we saw were those three that hit the aid-post! There is sometimes a supernatural shielding of the wounded.

4.20.—The Huns have put a barrage across the valley behind us—the valley we marched across an hour or two ago. No living thing can cross that valley now. But we are all on the ridge. They are too late! Yet—do they know our plans?

4.32.—The whole earth rocks. Amidst the flying metal the men in the front line trench bob up and jump over the top. Silently the supports move up and take their places. The battle has begun.

The village of X—— lies in the next valley. We see the crumpled ruins. 'At all costs' the broken bricks and mortar must be taken! The bombers are over first.

'Tat-tat-tat!' The enemy's machine-guns speak. They have been deceitfully silent for three days, expecting this. Down go the bombers like ninepins. A platoon is about to follow them, but sees their fate. There are a few new lads in this platoon. They have never been introduced to Death, and hesitate. In a second the bombing officer sees this, turns, and shouts: 'Come on, lads! Follow me!' Another second the whole platoon is over charging slowly down the shell-pitted hillside, but the bombing officer falls, shot through the knee.

'Never mind me, boys! On you go!' he cries. One leg is broken, but the wounded officer staggers up somehow on the other leg and tries to plunge forward again. 'On, boys, on!' he shouts. But they are nearly

out of hearing now. Another bullet strikes him in the chest, and yesterday's prophecy is fulfilled.

'My last fight with the Boches, padre!' he had said.

The C.O.—our D.S.O. C.O.—rushes forward. Every Boche seems to have a machine-gun. The fire is terrific.

'Come on again, boys!' shouts the C.O. 'We're nearly there!' But a bullet passes through his abdomen, and he, too, falls.

And now the sergeant, who has his commission papers in his pocket, dashes forward straight into the flying lead.

'Come along, boys!—come along!' he cries, and also falls.

'Death or a medal for me, padre!' Death it was, and perhaps a medal too.

There is a lull in the storm. X—— is taken. The battalion on our left and ours have worried through; but at what a cost! God alone knows if we can hold it. Others before us have failed to do that. The ground we have crossed was often soft to our tread with the others' dead.

* * * * *

Dawn an hour ago. I am at the aid-post now. The mangled and torn are struggling through. A lieutenant straggles up, haggard and worn.

'Doc., I'm sorry to trouble you, but I—I think I'm gassed.'

He is, and we put him on a stretcher. The wily Hun has mixed a few gas-shells with the shrapnel.

'Where's my—my captain?' groaned the lad on the stretcher.

'Dead, laddie,' I said. 'Killed bombing a machine-gun. But, there, don't worry—it's useless!'

His head fell into his hands, his whole frame shook, and the tears streamed from his eyes.

'Dead! W—— dead! Poor W——! Poor W——! Dead!'

The stream of wounded flowed by for hours. Many had put on their first field dressings. We re-dressed them and sent them forward. They had to walk nearly two miles, many of them, after leaving us, before they got to the cars; some had to walk with broken heads and arms, and missing eyes and chins. They had to walk across

ground seething and spitting with breaking shells before they reached the cars, and then they had to travel a few miles more on wheels through the outer ring of hell. Some never reached the cars at all, and some cars never reached their base. I saw the bits of one car carried in by a motor lorry at dusk.

Now the stream of wounded thins out to an occasional one or two. The Hun snipers are about. The stretcher-bearers cannot live in the open. Still, they try, and two or three go down. We must wait for the cover of darkness. Merciful night! How often have we thanked God for the night, for hundreds of broken human forms are lying out still in the heat and dust and shells!

Never in my life shall I forget the hour of noon on that fateful August day. I have seen hundreds of dead out here. I have slept by the dead, eaten my food among the dead, but never felt for the dead as I did that day. Creeping along to the top of the ridge I came to what had been an ammunition dump, but with uncanny precision the Boches had put a fire-shell right on the dump, exploding thousands of rounds with

terrific force and noise. I saw the fire-shell fall and do its terrible work only too well. Close to the dump were two human forms lying on their backs, faces upward to the sun. One was a lad not twenty years of age. His slender little hands—almost the hands of a child—were crossed naturally upon his breast, and upon his face was a contented heavenly smile. He wore on his arm the familiar sign of the R.A.M.C. Next to him was an older man lying peacefully in the dust, the black smoke from the burnt-out dump near him ascending in a straight column-like incense into the blue sky. On the arm of this man's tunic were the familiar letters 'S.B.' A regimental stretcher-bearer and an R.A.M.C. bearer had fallen side by side in the noblest of actions on the very field of battle. Broken with emotion—for the lad was very young and bonny—I knelt by the newly dead and wept, releasing the burning tears of the deepest sorrow I have ever known. The awful, tragic waste of war gripped my soul at that hour as never before, and I vowed, there in the bloody dust, that after this war I would fight with all my heart and soul and mind and strength always

against all war, even though my puny efforts be of no avail.

Oh, the immortal glory of the stretcher-bearing men in this war! Silence into shame with fiery words of rebuke the man who jests about the regimental stretcher-bearer or the R.A.M.C.! Here on the very field of battle, while fighting was in progress, have I seen them out above the trenches hour after hour by day and by night, fully exposed to thousands of shells and bullets, walking calmly along the pathways of hell, away down to the dressing-station miles away in the valley. Here have I seen them fall and die, while others have calmly taken their places and carried their bleeding burdens on to safety. If you want to reward the heroes of the war, don't forget the fighters—no—but find also a regimental 'S.B.' or R.A.M.C. man who has been through this devilry on the slopes above the winding Somme, and see that that man wants for nothing as long as life shall last. If you want now to honour these men who so often go through all unnoticed, watch for one of their comrades as you walk down Fleet Street or Victoria Street, look out for the worn bit of tape on

the arm with 'S.B.' or a Red Cross on it, go to that man, shake his hand, and if it be in your power give him his heart's desire of that moment if it be good for him.

* * * * *

Night has fallen. The aid-post is nearly empty now, for the remnants of the battalion are being collected for the march 'out.' Glorious word, 'out'! Other troops have been hurried up to relieve us. The stragglers from our companies pass us by. Just a few N.C.O.'s and men and one or two officers—no more. The R.A.M.C. dressing-stations down the valley are full and busy now. As usual, these stations are in the midst of guns. It cannot be helped, but sometimes it increases the horrors of war. Shells bursting among the helpless wounded is the ghastliest of all sights. The wounded are coming in now from that part of the field close to the enemy's lines. The bearers are out in crowds searching every inch of ground. We are relieved to know how many have gone out. All is being done thoroughly and well.

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Sometimes there is a touch of grim humour in it all. I felt this once or twice to-night. I found creeping towards a dressing-station a Barrow man, open-mouthed, blear-eyed, wringing with sweat, and covered with dust. There was not much blood about him.

'Hallo, sonnie!' I said; 'what's up with you?'

'Wot's up wiv me, eh? Why, the whole of Church Street bloomin' well 'it me in the neck!'

By that remark, Barrow people will get some idea of the force with which earth thrown up by a Boche 5.9 shell hits you. I have been blown flat on my face into a trench by the concussion from one of those shells exploding a few yards away, and I weigh about thirteen stone!

Another lad I found crouching on the ground like a rabbit, and every time one of our guns went off springing like a grasshopper about two feet into the air, and nearer the Boche lines each time. He had never been under fire before. It was a dark night, and he must have imagined that the ear-splitting bark and blinding flash of our eighteen-pounders were the bursting of enemy shells.

His nerves had completely gone. He hugged me as a drowning man hugs a straw, and would not let me go—even in the motor—till I put him in a tent at the field ambulance miles away from the scene of action.

* * * * *

Half-past twelve, the day after. Sun up; a burning day. No rain for weeks; every object within sight white with chalky dust. In revenge, probably, for what we did yesterday, the Huns sent 'planes above our peaceful camp this morning. I was awakened by a 'dud' bomb dropping outside my 'dug-out.' After midday breakfast I strolled round the sleeping camp. The cooks, making a meal, gave me some more tea. I must have some of their tea, bless them! They could not do enough for the survivors. There were tears in their eyes as they dished out to the lads. I walked round the empty tents and bivouacs of the officers of yesterday. Those officer comrades of mine will never need any cover but the earth again. Only one tent had occupants. The kits of the dead were packed in piles. I counted

the surviving heroes. It was soon done. I came away very sad.

Across the thistle-dotted grass I met the staff captain staggering wearily home.

'It's all over, padre,' he said. 'I can hardly walk. Guide me. Is that Brigade Head Quarters there? Ah, thank you!'

A great responsibility had rested on this man's shoulders, and he had borne it well. Day and night, for over a week, he had been on the spot, moving here, there, and everywhere; sleeping for an hour or so in the afternoon; eating and drinking when he could. Again and again have I seen him far away at the most important spot at the most critical times. Every officer and man relies upon and loves him. His appearance is always an inspiration.

* * * * *

I can see the village X—— through my new pair of Boche glasses. It is taken, but we leave it to others. It is piled with khaki and blue-grey tunics. The tunics are not empty. The khaki ones—many of them—are ours. But the village is taken.

Now I must get up out of the dust. Ammunition limbers are tearing by. There will be a counter-attack to-night.

Another colleague has just fallen between that valley of death and this camp—the C. of E. padre—shot through the head.

V

OUT—AND IN AGAIN

'X' OF my last letter was, of course, Guillemont, which we took, but, like others, could not hold. Another division had to relieve us and complete the work. We broke the enemy's back, then returned thinned and weary, while others took the spoils. We do not want to rob them of their glory, but we must insist that we prepared the way. But what matters, so long as progress is made?

Mr. Beach Thomas has well described the battles which raged around this village stronghold. It has been perhaps the hardest nut of all to crack. The Boche strategy was more than once successful. He retired, let our men go through, then advanced again by means of underground passages in the village, and turned his machine-guns on the

backs of our troops. The concentration of our artillery against Guillemont has exceeded anything we have seen during the war. One valley, for example, was so packed with batteries that the guns practically touched each other. These guns were never silent, night or day. When a battery was silenced by enemy fire it was replaced immediately, and a continuous stream of shells swept over our heads, reminding us of one of Bairnsfather's pictures with a covey of shells filling all space above the trenches. In this valley many artillery men laid down their lives, including Herbert Wolstenholme, a brave young Wesleyan, who was killed while asleep in his dug-out in the early morn. A road winding through this valley was the only highway for the infantry to one part of the line, and this road was lined with dead. We stumbled over the bodies in the darkness. Then we buried them, but stumbled over more the following night. Horses and mules, too, stiff and swollen, lay about among the men, dumb comrades in death, and as we passed them by at night their presence was revealed by the buzzing of millions of flies—a veritable plague of insects covering all.

On this road fell our Church of England chaplain-comrade, Spink, of Liverpool, mentioned in my last letter. He was returning from a burial. 'I will wait up for you,' said Fisher, my Nonconformist colleague at the next dressing-station. But he waited in vain, and at last sent out a Ford car with searchers. They found the padre's body among a group of his own men, riddled, all of them, with shrapnel. He loved his men well, and was with them crossing the river. He would have had it so, but how wistfully will his widowed mother look towards that river now. On this road also was the dressing-station described in my last letter, the station so dangerously situated among the guns. It seemed to us a miracle that it stood. Not one shell now and then, but one hundred an hour, fell within twenty yards of its sand-bagged entrance. An hour or two after I left it the end came. The poor old shanty got a direct hit from a great crumper, and in two seconds was a mass of smoking débris. Hitchings, one medical officer, was killed outright, and Captain Frew, another jolly M.O. with whom we had worked and joked a few hours previously,

lies badly mangled in hospital, while many a wounded man and R.A.M.C. orderly lies silent in his grave. Outside this station, two days before its destruction, I met Captain Brocklebank, a R.F.A. hero, of Barrow. His left arm was smashed and in a sling. I urged him to 'go down.'

'No, padre,' he said, 'no man can be spared from this show as long as he can stand.' Next day he was killed, standing by his guns. At the time I saw him he was searching for his brother in order to have a chat and a cup of tea. His brother happened to be our adjutant, and I was able to direct the seeker to our head quarters. Was it presentiment that brother should be seeking brother the night before his death?

And now all this is changed! These valleys that roared with guns now often ring with laughter. The artillery dug-outs have been turned into 'homes.' Guillemont lies well within our lines. Ginchy is held with a grip that the once mighty Prussian fist—now sorely weakened by loss of blood—can never loosen. Soon there will be heard the rattle of English guns on the roads of Combles; already its houses are levelled

by our mighty engines twelve miles away in the mists, and before winter sets in—well, wait and see! Those of us who can see here what is going on behind the lines know that all that has been done so far is so much clearing of the ground for great events quickly to follow. The 'push' is not over. It is gathering momentum. Germany has not yet felt the full might of England's arm. Much is being 'saved up' both in strength and strategy for the final knock-out blow. This is not journalese. Optimism is a safe dish for daily consumption now, for excellent reasons soon to be fully revealed before all the world.

After our push we trekked, and reinforcements reached us. We trekked for many miles, and one day, while the sun shone, we sat on the golden sand by the deep blue sea and watched fair Parisian damsels paddling in the foam. Sea, ships, shrimps, sand, and sweet, fresh fish out of the deep; beautiful women, pretty children, artistic villas, comfortable rooms, warm, soft-sheeted beds—oh! the luxury of such a rest after the atmosphere of lyddite, the fumes of tear shells, the blasted country-side, the dusty

lorries, the bark-ripped, branchless trees, the bleeding, powder-encrusted bodies of groaning men! We visited, too, a neat little port from which William the Conqueror set sail for England with four hundred ships of the line. I wonder how many readers can give the name of that place without reference to a history book. I had forgotten it till I got there. On the quay-side near by the rocking fishing-smacks is a metal plate that marks the spot where William stepped aboard. And here is a mathematical problem: If William the Conqueror required four hundred ships for the successful invasion of England in 1066, how many will William the Vanquisher require in 1916? Eight hundred and fifty years after, and with the blood of the Norman Conqueror in their veins, our troops stand upon the land he sailed from to defend the land he won.

But these sweet days of peace ended abruptly. The corps could not do without us. All our reinforcements had arrived—officers and men. So one still summer's evening we took our last longing look across the ocean towards Blighty—so near and yet so far. We turned our backs on England,

and with heavy feet marched silently towards death again; so silently did we march that we could hear the gentle sighing of the wind in the lovely leafy trees, so silently that we could hear the soft thud of the ripe apple on the dewy earth at the roadside. The rain-cleared air was sweet with the scent of honeysuckle, thick on the hedges near this coast, and reminding us so vividly of home. One or two of the lads were crying quietly in the darkness. War seemed too horrible just then.

'Keep in touch—keep in touch! Hi! "D" Company's connecting file, are you there? Right-o! Bang! Get down! Get down! Get in there!'

'Tis an officer's voice ringing out these orders. We are in the reserve trenches again amid shells and chalk and mud and musty dug-out smells. To-morrow we return into action, to the front line and—'across the lid.'

It is dusk and I am trying to find the advanced dressing-station to take up my battle post. There is no village to be stormed this time, but a line of trenches to be won, and as the A.D. Station is to be near the

entrance to our communication trenches, that, I decide, is the best place for me. But where is this spot? For once I have lost my map and am helpless. I hie me to Brigade Head Quarters.

'The position of the A.D. Station of our Brigade, padre?' said the Major. 'Certainly. The map reference is Z 26, Q 3, 7.'

'Thank you, sir,' said I, not daring to mention that I had lost my map.

Going up the road as helpless as ever, I passed a moving figure and stopped it.

'Hi, you, whoever you are, d'ye know Z 26, Q 3, 7?'

'No, sir, I don't; he ain't in my company, but there's a corporal coming along and he may know him.'

I had one clue. I knew the name of the wood nearest the trench, and with that clue, after pottering about for an hour and stumbling into two batteries which spit out sparks all over me, I found the station, as usual, snugly restful among the guns. The flash of the guns eventually revealed its position to me. If you want to know what this station is like, watch for the second film of the Battle of the Somme. It's on that,

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a sand-bagged opening in the earth, stretchers lying about, a few trees in the background, with Boche prisoners going by and our men giving them water and cigarettes. (This was Bernafay Wood dressing-station.) The man with the camera also took our kitchen and our cook, who was making tea in a petrol tin for representatives of all the Churches and of the medical profession. This bold cinema man fixed his apparatus on a spot which the Boches had been shelling nearly all the day, so I called him off and explained matters. He was so grateful that he intended taking me with my Sunday smile on dealing out Woodbines to grinning Bavarians, but at the moment the prisoners went by I was below patching up a leg. It was rather a pity because in preparation for the event I had washed my face in the last drop of cold tea which had been saved for supper. It had never been filmed before, and even the sacrifice of the tea was not too great, although we had to go nearly two miles to get a drop of drinking water.

Our record at this station was five days and nights, wounded numbered in four fingers, and the first of the four not a 'one

about seven hours' sleep, one wash (in cold tea), no shave, boots and clothes never off, and to eat, a few tins of sardines, a tin of peaches, a packet of biscuits, a bit of jam and bread. During most of this time Captain Ellis, one of the medical officers, worked continuously without any sleep. Our tunics, breeches, and hands were stained with blood, but our hearts were light, for that station saved many men from slipping into the hungry jaws of death.

Our losses were not so great as in the other stunt, but it was very pathetic to see, going home on stretchers, fine young officers and men who had only joined our ranks from England a few days before. One officer, after being many months at the base following on service in the early battles of the war, came straight up to us and went straight in to his death. Death seems to have marked down such men, and will have them sooner or later. A sergeant who escaped going into the battle of Guillemont laid down his life this time, and Dobson, our late bombing officer's orderly, will bring back no more souvenirs. Poor Dobby! He wrote for a copy of *The Methodist Times* in which I

mentioned him, but we have no means of sending it on to him. The merry lad has soon followed his master into the next room in the Father's Mansion.

Among those who passed away in our hands and were buried in the little cemetery we made outside the dressing-station was Corporal Brimelow, a promising Wesleyan N.C.O., of Warrington, and among those who went down our way wounded was Second-Lieutenant C. H. F. Crawshaw, the son of the Rev. James E. Crawshaw, of Halifax. Crawshaw only joined us a day or two before, declared himself a Methodist of Methodists, and, as luck would have it, shared the padre's tent. Luckily his wound, we believe, is not very serious, and we hope soon to see him again.

During the stunt one of our battalion aid-posts went into the air, and the medical officer, MacVicker, a brilliant young Canadian, was killed. We worked with him in the Guillemont show and mourn his loss deeply. Always the best seem to be taken. That is often because they are the bravest.

There were some remarkable cases among the wounded. One lad walked in with a

bullet-hole through his lung and the bullet sticking out of his back, yet the lung had not collapsed, and the lad seemed to be then little the worse for his experience. Another had his frontal bones smashed. Part of the brain was protruding over the eye, yet this man was conscious and talking intelligently. This case was a surprise for the medical men, and requires a lot of explanation. Theories explode in face of facts. Another lad, shot through the kidneys, was so sure he would be wounded that he had made his field post-card out beforehand and had it in his pocket: 'I have been wounded . . . am in hospital,' &c., all ready for posting before the event!

The wounded Boches—all Bavarians this time—were extremely anxious to know whether their wounds were slight or serious, and were very satisfied when told 'slight.' That is one curious difference between our men and the Germans. It is not often that our boys ask if their case is a serious one. They are obviously relieved by our assuring words, but they rarely ask the question. The wounded Boches pester us unceasingly until we tell them—and then they ask again. One merry unwounded Bavarian, who brought

a loaf of black bread over with him, spoke English fluently. He had been a waiter in Eastbourne before the war, and wished he were there now. We thought this was not a bad choice. He told us that our artillery fire was so intense in places that it had been impossible to get up rations to some battalions for three days, hence the great number of prisoners. This young enemy came in with his officer and thirty men. The party surrendered to a second-lieutenant and two Tommies. The Boche officer complained of sickness, but the Eastbourne waiter exclaimed in English: 'He's alri'. Funk! He was well enough when we left the trenches.' Perhaps he wanted a ride in a motor ambulance, but at any rate the incident showed us that the German soldier has sometimes scant respect for his officers; and also that the Eastbourne waiter knew his Englishman well enough to be sure that a healthy officer prisoner would be as comfortable in our hands as a sick one. There is not much doubt that this young German's love of England and faith in our generosity had led his thirty comrades to surrender, which serves to prove further that frightfulness and reprisals do not

pay in the long run. Treat your prisoners well, and thirty will soon become three thousand. The news trickles through, and many Boches are weary of the war. This one told me that many more Bavarians would surrender but for the fear of being bombed and shot as they came over. Tommy has rightly become suspicious of 'surrender signs,' and so, too often, the enemy who wants to give himself up now finds it dangerous and difficult to do so, and often pays with his life for his comrades' treachery earlier in the war. We had such a case in our station—a giant Bavarian badly broken up by a Mills hand grenade in the act of surrender. There is no doubt that our wise and generous treatment of prisoners is going to play an important part in the last stages of the war.

VI

RELIGION IN THE ARMY

In two or three of the religious newspapers I have recently seen references, by one chaplain and another, to the over-estimate of the religious effect of the war on our soldiers. It is declared that the war has made little or no difference. One hardly likes to discuss the matter. It is probable that both sides, in the various testimonies, are quite correct, only quite local also. The difficulty is to get a witness with candour, insight, and a wide experience. I am inclined to think that, at the beginning of the war, the soldiers were impressed, and then took to religion in their own way. They were rather glad to be kind to the padre. They felt and were solemn. The war has gone on for a long time now, and it appears likely to go on for some time

yet. It is becoming a business, and with the business there comes the business habit.

I saw this paragraph the other day, and was arrested and held thinking by it. I do not claim to be over-blessed with the required qualifications of 'candour, insight, and wide experience,' but probably I have a few grains of the first two, and certainly have had a pretty extensive experience. In the ranks and as a padre I have been attached to the Regulars, Kitchener's, and the Territorials, and as Director of Divisional Canteens have supplied the temporal needs and come into close contact with the men of six Divisions other than my own, have served in two others in France, and touched yet a number of others in England also. I have been among our soldiers as comrade and officer since October, 1914, and have studied them carefully. My own experience has been in England, Belgium, and France, but I have had long and illuminating letters from chums in Gallipoli, Egypt, and Salonika, in fact, in every part of the war area except Africa, and, as far as religion is concerned, things seem to be pretty much the same everywhere.

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NO NEED FOR PESSIMISM

Let me give you the fruit of my experience for what it is worth. First, we must certainly be careful 'not to over-estimate the religious effect of the war on our soldiers.' Do not imagine there will be a grand rush to the churches after the war as a result of it. Do not imagine that the football fields, theatres, and cinemas will be empty. They will not. They get far bigger 'gates' out here, actually under shot and shell, than the churches do. On the other hand, do not be pessimistic. 'Man is incurably religious.' No one who has worked among our lads for eighteen months can be a pessimist. I have a greater faith in humanity than before the war. I cannot help myself. In Anglo-Saxon humanity I mean. I have learned the secret of England's greatness.

The Jews were a chosen race. So are we. I can believe now all the yarns I have read in story-books and historical volumes of our noble spirit, courage, and endurance in the centuries gone by. The average English lad at heart is a hero, and is chivalrous, just, generous, kind-hearted, humorous, and very

lovable, with a genuine longing for purity and love. But sin is strong; the devil dupes; truth is twisted; heaven is in the mists. All the possibilities of saintliness are just below the surface of the English lad's soul, but circumstances and conditions are against him out here, and also the pictures presented to him of his Saviour are often too distorted or ghostly or anaemic to attract him to His side. We *must* preach a strong, manly, vigorous, humour-loving, winsome Jesus. Would to God the traditional portrait were torn from every gallery wall. It is not the New Testament painting.

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HIGH CHURCH CHAPLAINS

Again, it is not the New Testament message that fails, it is too often the deliverer, the method of delivery and the paste and scissors and blue-pencilled New Testament message that is at fault. That our success is not greater we padres have only ourselves to blame. The Bishop of London said the other day that one of his chaplains had told him that 'not twenty men in a Brigade, but twenty in a Division communicate.' The

Bishop's informer must have been a pessimist. I can say of at least ten Divisions, Regulars, Kitchener's, and Territorials, that this is not true. The number is greater, often much greater, than that, not only in the Church of England but in the other Churches; but if the number is not as great as it ought to be in the Established Church, that Church has only herself to blame. She has a preponderance of High Churchmen among her chaplains—judging from my experience—quite sixty to seventy per cent., and many of these are very High Churchmen, much too high to appeal to the tastes of the Tommies who are marched to their Parade Services. Our Recreation Rooms at the front were opened every Sunday and sometimes on week-days for services for all Churches, and I had a splendid opportunity to take note of things, and I used it. Many of these High Churchmen light their candles, put images of Christ and the Madonna on their improvised altars, and use the Missal, St. Swithin's Prayer Book, and other Roman Catholic manuals in their services. Tommy is suspicious of these practices. He is as true as a die himself. He may never have heard

of the Jesuits. But he feels all is not quite as it should be, so he fights shy.

A GOOD SING AND A MANLY SERMON

This is not my imagination. Anglican officers and men have spoken to me of these things, confirming my thoughts, and I myself have seen service after service of this kind widely advertised yet unattended. The padre waits for two hours for two services. No one turns up, and off he goes to complain to the C.O. But it is his own fault. He introduces a lot of trumpery nonsense with prayers to the 'sinless Mother of God and the blessed Saints,' multiplies the celebrations till Tommy is utterly weary of them, and has little or no confidence in the foolishness of his preaching as a means to salvation. More often it is the more brotherly and sensible Low Churchman who gets the men both to his voluntary services and to Communion. Strongly evangelical and simple in their discourses are many of these padres. To go to their Communion table, and often as a Wesleyan Tommy have I been invited to do so—despite Kikuyu—is a delight. I remember, in particular,

one such chaplain, a colonel, who sent us away burning with wonderful words of love and power. His whole theme was Christ, and every man was inquiring afterwards in the barns, 'When is he coming again? Let me know.' To this day some of the 'irreligious' in that service speak to me about it when I see them. But these Low Churchmen get about as much sympathy from their High brothers out here as Dissent does.

Believe me, Tommy likes a good sing and a good manly sermon all about the Saviour in a strong spiritual atmosphere in which alone the soul lives and flourishes, an atmosphere which leaves a burning fire and a clinging sweetness in the soul, with just a Communion Service now and then. If he gets that from the padre he will come to the services. Priestly pretensions simply alienate men in the army.

Among the Nonconformists we find things much the same as at home. The men who were religious there are religious here, with a few exceptions. They seek to bring their chums along to the voluntary services, and often succeed. Many Wesleyan and Baptist

N.C.O.'s hold little services in their dug-outs in the trenches and in barns, and without question their influence in their companies is nearly always very great indeed. A religious C.O. or sergeant-major is a tower of strength to the padre, and where you find such in a battalion you generally find the services well attended. There is more in that sentence than meets the eye.

THE PADRE'S DIFFICULTIES

The difficulties of the padre at the front are great. On an average seven out of ten services arranged fall through or are seriously interrupted. Necessary parades of all sorts must be held on Sundays, as on other days, but, as a rule, when men are free to come to an advertised voluntary service they will turn up in good numbers. As at home, if the service is at the right time, in a bright hall or hut, with good music and a good address, the men will come in crowds—regardless of what denomination the padre may be. If the service is in a leaky barn in the pouring rain you can count on the faithful few being there.

But without question one must agree with the writer of the quoted paragraph when he says, 'I am inclined to think that at the beginning of the war the soldiers were impressed, and then took to religion in their own way.' In the early days of the war at Aldershot, and later also on Salisbury Plain, one remembers the packed chapels and Y.M.C.A. huts, the Holy Crusade spirit of the men, the mighty volume of fervent song, the rich, melting after-meetings, the numerous conversions, the many vows of the warriors going forth to fight for the cause of God in a strange land. But the novelty of crusading wore off, and now, after the weary months out here, to these men—yes—the war *has* become a business, 'and with the business there comes the business habit.' I feel sure the Holy Crusade spirit has practically evaporated. It would be good if we could revive it. The Press especially should do all in its power to this end. After six months in action or inaction men settle down with a dogged determination to see the thing through with a more or less 'fed up' feeling, but probably few think very deeply now of the great principles for which they came out

to fight. A few great preachers with the Cromwellian touch touring the whole field would do us all good at present.

As far, then, as religion is concerned, the war has only served to deepen the impression in some of us that, as in the past, so in the future, the needs of man's soul remain ever the same, and the Church which supplies those needs is the only one that counts.

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THE THIRSTING SOUL

The body of a man thirsts. It thirsts for water. Man cannot supply that need himself. The more he tries the more will his body thirst. If the need be not supplied the body will shrivel and die. Water he must have to keep life in the blood and the heart-beating true.

There is another truth that no one can deny, a truth that outlives all arguments concerning it, namely, that the soul of man also thirsts—thirsts for something, and cannot rest until it is satisfied. Nay, more, the soul of man will shrivel and die if it get not that something it thirsts for.

As pants the hart for cooling streams,
When heated in the chase,
So longs my soul, O God, for Thee,
And Thy refreshing grace.

Jesus says the soul thirsts for 'living waters.' Rich words those. Water the body needs. *Living* water the soul needs. The soul cannot supply the need itself, no more than the body can supply the pure water it needs. The soul of man is not self-sustaining. It depends for its existence upon living waters, that must come from an outside source. A living stream must feed it.

It does not matter much what sort of vessel the Spirit comes through as long as the vessel is clean. A good, plain jug without much ornamentation will do. The thirsty one on Gallipoli's sands would bless a jam-tin if only it had pure water in it. This is the great lesson of the war. It matters little to Tommy what vessel the water comes in. It's the water he wants. And depend upon it, if the vessel of the Wesleyan Methodist Church—whatever its colour, shape, or quality—contains that which supplies the need of Tommy Atkins, he will come and

come again after the war, and his soul will grow and grow till it reaches the Ideal foreseen of God when He created it. O nation, give him the food for his body. O Church, give him the Food for his soul.

Thou, O Christ, art all I want.

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